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AUTHOR Potts, Randy
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ABSTRACT

Focusing on conversational stories of personal experience (SPEs), this paper explores the narrative skills of preschool-aged black children in a low-income, urban community. Although linguistic and anthropological work attest to a flourishing tradition of story telling among black adults, little is known about the ways in which children become skilled participants in that tradition. Developmental research has focused on white children and on literary or make-believe stories. The purposes of this study were to document what 4-year-old black children know about the content, structure, and function of SPEs, and to compare stories initiated by children with those initiated by others. A conversational narrative was defined as an episode of talk in which the child produced at least two clauses addressed to an interlocutor and referring to a particular event. Stories were collected from 5 preschool-aged children. Findings indicated: (1) frequent and effective use of SPEs by children for communicating a variety of experiences and sustaining a social relationship; (2) a high degree of mastery of SPEs by 4 years of age, particularly with respect to the use of evaluative devices; and (3) greater elaboration and complexity of narratives initiated by children, compared to stories initiated by others. References number 57. (Author/RH)

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West Side Stories:
Children's Conversational Narratives in a Black Community*

Randy Potts

University of Chicago

Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development
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WEST SIDE STORIES: CHILDREN'S CONVERSATIONAL NARRATIVES IN A BLACK COMMUNITY

Randolph Potts,

This paper explores the narrative skills of preschool-aged black children from a low-income, urban community, focusing on conversational stories of personal experience (SPEs). Although linguistic and anthropological work attests to a flourishing tradition of storytelling among black adults, little is known about how children become skilled participants in that tradition. Developmental research has focused instead on white children and on literary or make-believe stories. The purpose of this paper is: (1) to document what 4 year old black children know about the content, structure, and function of SPEs; and (2) to compare stories initiated by the child with those initiated by others. Stories were collected from 5 children under conditions designed to promote a free-flowing exchange of talk. Findings indicate that the children frequently and effectively used SPEs, often of considerable complexity, in communicating a variety of experiences and sustaining a social relationship. The findings indicate a high degree of mastery of this narrative genre by 4 years of age, particularly with respect to the use of evaluative devices. The finding of greater elaboration and complexity of child initiated narratives is of particular importance in that most studies within the literature on child development have relied exclusively on the elicitation of stories by researchers.

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This paper explores the narrative skills of preschool-aged black children from a low-income, urban community, focusing on conversational stories of personal experience. A widely held view in psychology and throughout the social sciences is that personal experience, the personal meaning and significance of events, are not *given* in the events themselves, but are actively *constructed* by the individual. Personal experience stories can be seen as *reconstructions,* interpretations, and intrapersonal communications of personal experience. When produced by young children, these stories not only demonstrate language skills, but may also reveal aspects of a child's developing self-understanding, understanding of self-other relationships, and understanding of human interaction generally. It has been suggested that narratives may play a privileged role in the process of self construction (Miller, 1988). It is through stories, says Gergen (1986), that selves are revealed in culture.

Although linguistic and anthropological work attests to a flourishing tradition of personal storytelling among black adults, little is known about how children become skilled participants in that tradition. Developmental research has focused instead on white children and on literary, fictive or make-believe stories. The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to document what four-year-old black children know about the content, structure, and evaluative dimension of conversational stories of personal experience; and (2) to compare stories initiated by the child with those initiated by other people. The approach to this problem is informed by anthropological and sociolinguistic perspectives on talk as situated communication.

Background

This problem is located at the intersection of three literatures: (1) Personal storytelling among black adults; (2) Personal storytelling among black children; and (3) Sociolinguistic and anthropological perspectives on situated talk.

1. Personal Storytelling Among Black Adults

There has long been a flourishing tradition of personal storytelling in Afro-American communities. According to Smitherman (1986), personal storytelling is such a strong element in "black communicative dynamics that it pervades general everyday conversation" (p. 161). Examples and analyses of storytelling in a black community in the Piedmont Carolinas are given by Heath (1983). A *Self-Portrait of Black America* is presented by Gwaltney (1981) through a collection of personal narratives from north-eastern urban black communities. Gwaltney, born and raised in one of these same communities and a participant in this flourishing, vernacular storytelling tradition, argues that personal narratives, offered within contexts of amity, confidence, security and reciprocity, can reveal the theory-building and analytic capabilities of people who are "eminently capable of self-expression" (p. xxii).

The tradition of personal storytelling in black communities is not only revealed in everyday conversation. This tradition also finds expression in other secular as well as "sacred" genres of talk. For example, most of the secular modes of black rhetorical performance subsumed under "signifying" (Mitchell-Kernan, 1981; Smitherman, 1986) contain elements of personal storytelling. It is "signifying", says Abrahams (1970, p.52), "to stir up a fight between neighbors by telling stories." From the realm of the "sacred" genres of talk, testifying is a form of personal storytelling that is usually about an individual's experience of "being saved". "The retelling of these occurrences in lifelike fashion recreates the spiritual reality for others who at that moment vicariously experience what the testifier has gone through" (Smitherman, 1986, p. 150).

Afro-American literature has been largely shaped by vernacular storytelling, certain novels having been referred to as a "pastiche

of the Afro-American narrative tradition itself" (Gates, 1984, p. 289). One example (among many others) of a vernacular storytelling technique used and expanded upon in Afro-American literature is repetition. In *Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture,* Snead (1984) cites the work of Afro-American novelists Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, Ishmael Reed and others, in describing the extensive use of and stylistic elaborations upon repetition within Afro-American literature, a technique "derived from spoken discourse..." (p. 71). In Afro-American literature, the repetition of words and phrases "is exploited as a structural and rhythmic principle" (p.70). Repetition and repetition with variation have been observed within the narratives of black adults and children by Heath (1983), and in the personal stories of black adolescents by Kernan (1977). Within his system of narrative analysis (to be described below), Labov (1972) includes repetition among the evaluative devices called "intensifiers" (p. 379).

Labov's influential narrative analysis was developed in large part from a corpus of personal experience stories from black speakers -- particularly those from south-central Harlem (Labov & Waletsky, 1967; Labov, 1972). Labov's model is called a "structural/functional" model because it entails both a structural formulation, along with related narrative functional categories. This structural formulation consists of six ordered elements to be found in fully developed narratives: abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution and coda. The *abstract* encapsulates the point of the story. The *orientation* provides information regarding time, place, setting and character. The *complication* encodes a temporally-ordered sequence of events that are terminated in a *resolution*. The action in the narrative is temporarily suspended in the *evaluation* segment. The *coda* closes out the story, reconnecting the end of the story with the present.

In the Labovian model, evaluation is not only one of the six structural elements in a narrative, it is also one of two primary functions of narrative, the other being referential (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletsky, 1967; Polanyi, 1985). The referential function of narrative involves the recapitulation of experience in the temporal sequence in which (it is inferred) the events actually occurred. This function is implemented in narratives by arranging event clauses in the proper temporal sequence (i.e. *a* happened, then *b*, and then *c*). Such a series of events usually constitutes the main body of a narrative. The referential function of narrative, according to Labov & Waletsky (1967, p. 33), is accomplished through three structural elements – the complicating action, orientation and resolution.

The evaluative function of narrative indicates the point, the significance of the narrative in the social context in which it occurs, and reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the events recounted. Evaluation makes the narrative more than a dispassionate reporting or replaying of a sequence of past events. Through linguistic, discoursal and paralinguistic means, the narrator indicates his/her affective disposition toward the experiences being shared, and conveys the personal meaning that they have for him/her. The evaluation function in narrative is carried out not only by the abstract and coda, but also by the use of evaluative language throughout the narrative.

In sum, personal storytelling has long been widely and vigorously practiced in black communities both in everyday conversation and in the ritualised genres of signifying and testifying. In addition, Afro-American literature reflects elements of these oral traditions. Drawing on a large corpus of such stories from black communities, Labov developed a system for analysing and describing these stories told by speakers of the Black English Vernacular. Labov's system, adapted for use with children, will be used in this study on the assumption that it is the most appropriate system for describing this particular narrative genre being learned by black children.

2. Personal Storytelling Among Black Children

Despite this flourishing narrative tradition among black adults, very little is known about

how children in black communities become skilled participants in that tradition. One of the few investigations of this process appears in Heath's (1983) study of black children in a small town in the Carolinas -- "Trackton". Heath found that these children begin to tell stories about life experiences between the ages of two and four years. Heath's study provides some recorded examples of stories produced by two and a half year old children from Trackton which fit Labov's definition of a story and are describable within his system. These stories of "Lem" and "Teegie" (pp. 170-174) include some of the same evaluative techniques found in narratives of adults. While the topics of these children's stories varied, Heath found that their "primary messages" were of accomplishments and victories over adversity (p. 170).

Kernan (1977) conducted a study of personal experience narratives of older black children (seven- to fourteen-year-olds) using Labov's analytic framework. An important finding in Kernan's study was a particularly high frequency of clauses that indicate "the feelings of the narrator toward the events he is relating and that are used to attempt to convey that feeling to the audience" (p. 101). Such clauses fulfill what Kernan calls the "expressive function" of narrative, which is similar to Labov's evaluative function. Among the youngest group of storytellers in the study, 26% of the total clauses were expressive or evaluative. Among the oldest group -- 46%!

Labov's analysis of personal narratives has also been used in capturing important regularities in stories produced by a wide variety of speakers. Studies of other non-mainstream children's narratives have used adaptations of Labov's system: e.g. Brady's (1980) study of ten- and eleven-year-old Navajo children and Watson's (1973) study of five- to seven-year-old Hawaiian children. In fact, the only systematic studies of the early development of conversational stories of personal experience among any group of children have used adaptations of Labov's system (e.g. Umiker-Sebeok, 1979; Miller & Speery, 1988). Moreover, in the only study to apply multiple analytic schemes to a single corpus of children's narratives, Peterson & McCabe (1983) found the Labovian "high point" analysis tailored specifically to personal experience narratives, capturing and "sensitively" describing the personal meaning of experiences (p. 61).

In sum, there is a notable gap in the literature on personal storytelling among black children. The literature does contain, however, several analytic schemes adapted from Labov, that are appropriate for describing the personal stories of young black children. One of these will be used in the current study. In addition, some important themes seem to unite studies of black children's narratives: They are inextricably connected to community and family life. And the child's verbal performance reflects the particulars of the situation -- the communicative context -- in which it occurs.

The classic formulation of the latter notion appears in Labov's *The Logic of Nonstandard English* (in Labov, 1972, pp. 201-240). In this paper Labov critiqued the view of minority group children's verbal ability then current among psychologists and educators. Based on the language behaviors of black children in testing situations, studies during the 1960's concluded that black children suffered from language deficiencies. According to Deutsch (1967), working-class black children show an inability to hold a formal topic through speech sequences. Jensen (1968, p. 118) claimed that "much of lower-class language consists of a kind of incidental 'emotional' accompaniment to action here and now." Currently, performance in testing situations is still considered evidence to scholars such as Flynn (1980) that black children are indeed "linguistically deprived" and that arguments to the contrary represent "extreme cultural relativism" and a lack of "courage to face unpleasant facts" (p. 211).

In *The Logic of Nonstandard English* Labov attempts to show how greatly the situation can effect verbal behavior. Labov provides a striking illustration of the "sociolinguistic control of speech". Labov gives an example of a typical situation in which assessments of black children's verbal ability are made. A black child sits face-to-face with an impersonal, white stranger in a room in a city school, the stranger probing for answers to questions. The defensive,

monosyllabic behavior of the child is that of a person in a threatening "asymmetrical" situation, seeking to avoid saying anything that can "be held against him" (Labov, 1972, p.206). But Labov further shows that even a black interviewer who had obtained a high level of verbal response from black adolescents, was unsuccessful in obtaining such a response from a black eight-year-old. In other words, "race of interviewer" alone was not the "contextual variable" that could provide for the free flow of informal talk. It was only when the situation was made more casual and comfortable for the child -- his best friend was included, snack-food was served, and the adult sat on the floor and introduced child-oriented, "taboo" topics -- that the child began to talk more freely. The young black speaker who appeared monosyllabic, defensive, and inept when interviewed by an impersonal, strange adult, proved to be very expressive -- using a wide assortment of grammatical devices -- in a more comfortable context. Based on such observations, the situation was given central importance in Labov's study of narratives in the Black English Vernacular.

The present study will show that even when the setting is a comfortable one for the child, and even when the investigator is a familiar black adult who has gone to considerable lengths to establish a relationship with the child, there are differences between stories initiated by the child and those initiated by the investigator.

3. Sociolinguistic and Anthropological Perspectives on Situated Talk

Labov's perspective gibes very well with current perspectives within sociolinguistics and anthropology on talk as situated communication. The tradition of personal storytelling is situated within the rich vernacular economy of Afro-American linguistic expression. Events of personal storytelling are situated within specific social configurations. Goodwin (1982) analyzed a particular form of storytelling called "instigating" as practiced by seven- to thirteen-year-old black girls from West Philadelphia. The stories in this study are shown to be embedded in larger speech events -- gossip-disputes -- which not only organize the construction of these stories by the speaker, but their appropriate interpretation by the hearer. Goodwin's study provides an example of how social context and social processes beyond the immediate encounter provide the primary organization of storytelling.

Understanding conversational stories of personal experience requires giving due attention to the situation in which they occur, and the relationship between those playing the alternating roles of narrator and audience. Robinson (1981) describes narratives as situated communications in which "the contributions of the audience must be given equal consideration to those of the speaker or narrator" (p. 59). Conversational narratives occur within the flow of interpersonal communication. The quality of that communication, the richness, expansiveness and elaboration are largely determined by the quality of the relationship between the participants, the situation and the social circumstances surrounding that communication.

Given the central importance of the context in which samples of speech are collected for study, it is unfortunate that misconceptions persist about the concept of "context". The context of a speech event, according to Briggs (1987) is not simply the sum total of the social and physical elements present at the time of an interaction. Such a definition of context, says Briggs, "dichotomizes the analysis of 'contextual variables' from that of the verbal components of the discourse" (p. 25). Context includes the mode of discourse itself, e.g. it's cultural appropriateness or inappropriateness for a speaker. Context includes prior verbal and social interactions between speakers -- i.e. their social relationship and shared experiences. Briggs argues that context is a "phenomenological construct that is created jointly by the participants. Not only are contexts not simply situational givens, they are continually renegotiated in the course of the interaction" (p. 25).

METHODS

Subjects

The subjects were five children who ranged in age from 3;5 to 4;6 at the beginning of the study:

Child	Birthday	Age at Start of Study
Greg	7/12/82	4;6
Karla	2/10/83	3;11
Quinita	7/31/83	3;6
David	8/01/83	3;5
Calvin	8/16/83	3;5

The children lived in a black, low-income community on Chicago's Near West Side and attended a Parent-Child Center located in that community. This is a community with a 30% infant mortality rate (35% in the area immediately surrounding the Henry Horner Homes). This, and two adjoining West Side communities, had the three highest school drop-out rates among all 75 Chicago community areas (Community Analysis Project 1977). Three of the five children lived in the Henry Horner housing projects, a densely populated, high-rise public housing complex, whose residents are all (100%) black. Ninety percent of the families in this housing project are on public assistance, with a median family income of $5,185 (Chicago Housing Authority 1982). Each of the mothers of the children in this study was on public assistance and had at least two children. Three of the four mothers were single. The children, it should be noted, had regular contact with both parents, grandparents and extended family members who lived in the same community.

The Center was selected for this study because it was a supportive, informal and comfortable setting within this community where preschool-aged children and their parents gather regularly. The children and their mothers spend three days a week, ten months a year at the Parent-Child Center which offers a variety of activities for preschool children and their parents. Four of the five children in the study have been attending the Center since infancy. I was very fortunate in easily gaining access to the Center and the cooperation of the staff. This was because of (or in spite of) my initially being seen as an anomaly in three respects: (1) I was a University of Chicago behavioral scientist studying children's language in this black, low-income community; (2) I was a University of Chicago researcher conducting such a study without either receiving or distributing funds from a research grant; and (3) I was a University of Chicago behavioral scientist who was black, male, a former West Side resident and a participant in the black vernacular culture.

After having spent several weeks getting acquainted with the children, parents and staff at the Center, a member of the staff selected four children initially for the study. One child was that of a mother who was considered a "good talker" (i.e. very outspoken and verbally adept) by the other parents and staff. Two of the children were those of mothers who were considered "average" talkers, and another child was selected whose mother was not considered a particularly good talker (but had no known speech or verbal impairment). The fifth child was added to the study because the child's mother felt that her child was a prototype of the language learning child in that community.

Procedures

The conversational narratives in this study were collected over a five month period during informal conversation sessions at the Parent-Child Center. The conversation sessions were audio recorded and lasted an average of 25 minutes each, giving a total speech sample of 731 minutes (12.18 hours). In keeping with the sociolinguistic perspective that narratives are situated communications, a special effort was made to create the conditions for a free-flowing exchange of talk.

My task was twofold: I had to first develop a social relationship with the children in which I would be seen as a "good audience" for their talk. Secondly, the conversation

sessions had to have a setting and conversational mode that would be conducive to the flow of informal talk. A similar concern with establishing rapport and comfortable relationships with children prior to individual recordings is shown in the study of children's narratives conducted by Peterson & McCabe (1983). The current study, however, took a step further. In this study, building a relationship with the children also meant building a relationship with teachers, staff and the ongoing network of support with which the children interacted regularly. During the study, I visited the center two days per week (on two of the three days the children in the study attended). During visits I spent time in classroom and play areas, talking with children and teachers, helping with various activities such as painting, crafts, setting places for meals and going along on outings. At the request of the staff I presented a talk to the parents and another to the staff on language learning and literacy development. It was important to build a store of shared experiences with the children and develop a place (a "node") in the network of support for the children. But it was also important to establish an "exchange relationship" (Milroy 1987) within that network, a relationship in which information and services flowed in each direction, not just in the direction of the researcher. I assumed that being a familiar member of a sympathetic and supportive network, with shared experiences, would help make me more of a "good audience" for the children's talk.

The conversation sessions in which the narratives were recorded were also oriented toward exchange relationships. Prior to the sessions, I asked the children's mothers what topics or toys were of particular interest to their child. To each session I brought a new book, toy, set of post cards or other item to give to the child (to keep) that I thought the child would find interesting. I would also inquire about recent outings or experiences of the child and his or her classmates. Unlike Peterson & McCabe (1983) I did not use a standard set of "model" narratives of the investigator's experiences to elicit stories, or otherwise indicate to the children that I was seeking a specific genre of talk. Topics and talk centered on the particular child's interests and experiences. It was important in each session to establish a conversational mode and setting that would increase the likelihood of the children speaking informally and in the vernacular. Labov (1981) and Milroy (1987) point out the significance of obtaining maximum access to the vernacular, as it is the speaker's least overtly monitored style, and best reveals the regular structure of the child's speech.

Moreover, conversational narratives are more likely to occur in talk that most closely resembles casual conversation in the vernacular. In this mode, also called the "associational mode" (Robinson, 1981, p. 79), "the goal of conversation is the interaction itself, the mutual exchange of thoughts and experiences." Some discernible themes may be introduced in this mode (e.g. the zoo, cartoons, wrestling, etc.), but specific topics may vary freely. The conversation sessions in this study adopted an associational mode of conversation rather than an interview format. Wolfson (1976) and Robinson (1981) argue that interviews have a distinctive discourse structure that contrasts with spontaneous conversation, and that narratives in interviews are different from those in casual conversation. As discussed earlier in this paper, and illustrated by Labov's striking example, the responses of a child in an interview reflect the child's engagement with the conventions and constraints associated with the interview and, therefore, do not optimally reveal the full range of his or her verbal abilities.

Attempting to address the issue of "power relationships" in conversational settings, I varied the composition of the conversation sessions. The sessions took place in either an empty office or the room at the center where parents usually held meetings or talked informally. There were conversation sessions that included: (1) the child, mother and investigator, (2) the child, a sibling and investigator, (3) the child, a friend of the same age and investigator, and (4) the child and investigator. It was my original assumption that the first three conditions would be more conducive to informal talk than the fourth, since in those situations the child would be in the company of members of their own pre-

existing social network or primary group. There were, however, some factors enhancing the likelihood of casual talk in the fourth condition. I had been working to establish the role of a sympathetic listener and "good audience", and this was to be seen as my primary role in these conversation sessions, whereas peers, friends and mothers assumed other roles than that of just fostering talk.

Early in the study it appeared that the conversation sessions including two adults -- the investigator and the mother -- were not the most optimal for fostering the child's informal talk. The first conversation session with Karla (who ultimately produced the longest single narrative in the corpus) was one with her mother and the investigator present. In this initial session, I received only bashful smiles, nods, shoulder shrugs and very brief, softly spoken responses (if any). In Karla's first session the following exchange occurred (which bears remarkable resemblance to the typical interview responses occurring under asymmetrical relationships described earlier by Labov (1972)):

R: When you play with your toys,
what's your favorite?
What kind of toy do you like to play with?
K: (smiles/shrugs shoulders)
R: Don't you have a toy that's your
favorite toy?
K: (nods yes)
R: What is it?
K: (shrugs shoulders)
M: What's your teacher's name Karla?
K: (shrugs shoulders)
M: Hum?
K: (no response)
M: What's your teacher's name?
K: (shrugs shoulders)
M: What's your name?
K: (shrugs shoulders)

One child, Calvin, had an innovative way of responding to this unbalanced adult-child "power relationship" that existed in the conversation sessions including both investigator and mother. Calvin found it appropriate not to simply be silent, but to ascertain exactly what the two conspiring adults did not want to hear about, which topic he then pursued tenaciously!

M: Tell him what you was telling me,
that you seen at the fire station,
besides the beds and the blankets and the
pillows.
C: And the toilets.
M: And besides the toilets, Calvin! What else
did you see?
C: And, another bed.
M: Calvin. (laugh)
R: (laugh)
M: Didn't you see the equipment on the truck?
C: Yep.
M: You not telling us. Tell us about it again.
C: Bathroom and the beds.
M: That's enough of that. (laugh)
C: (laugh)
R: (laugh)
M: It's not funny now. What else, did you see the
firemen with their hats and their boots on?
C: Yep.
M: And what else?
C: There was a, hat on. Not no boots.
M: O.K.
C: They had a hat on.
M: Um hum. (pause) I want you to tell him what
happened at the fire station.
C: (pause/silence)
M: That Calvin, right here, he's not gone (laugh)
C: (laugh)
R: (laugh)
C: Uh, I saw the bathroom and the toilets.
M: I'm so sick of the bathroom and the toilets.
R: I guess that made a big impression on him,
huh? (laugh)
.
.
.
M: (To Calvin) That's not important!
Listen. Stop. You not going to tell me what
happened at the fire station? Hum?
C: YEP!
M: Well TELL HIM !
C: Uh, I, saw toilet and the bathroom.

In this same session, however, when a topic of major interest to the child was brought up -- wrestling -- he eagerly began

talking on that subject, and consequently produced narratives.

As shown in these examples, this study included some attempts to elicit narratives from the children. Since the conversation sessions took the children away from the activities of their group, and since the principle focus of the study was on narrative, I would often attempt to elicit narratives during the course of the conversations in order to obtain a larger corpus of narratives. This sometimes involved asking the mother to ask the child to tell us about something that happened in the past. Narratives that were elicited were coded separately from those that were child initiated. Perhaps indicating a functioning exchange relationship, the children regularly found it appropriate to solicit information (often including narratives) from me. They wanted to know, for example, where I lived and in what type of dwelling (a house or apartment), if I had a car (and what type), if I had children (and why not), and why I wore a mustache and not a beard.

In sum, paralleling strategies appearing in Peterson & McCabe (1983), in attempting to optimize the conditions under which personal narratives would occur, great care was taken in this study to (1) establish comfortable, congenial and reciprocal relationships between the children and the investigator; and (2) maintain a casual, conversational mode of verbal interaction with the children, as opposed to that of an interview or test.

ANALYSES

Definition of Conversational Narrative

A conversational narrative was defined as an episode of talk in which the child produced at least two clauses addressed to an interlocutor and referring to a particular event. One of the two clauses must be an "event clause" (Polanyi, 1985, p. 10), referring to an occurrence "having an instantaneous rather than durative or iterative character", corresponding to what Labov calls "complicating action". The other clause may be either another event clause, or a clause that describes the event's setting or the characters involved -- an "orientation" clause (Labov, 1972), "state clause" (Polanyi, 1982), or "durative descriptive" clause (Polanyi, 1985). As narratives in this study are conversational, involving the interaction of other conversational partners, these two clauses need not appear in a single turn-at-speaking. Interlocutors might also contribute turns in a narrative's presentation. Also, in this definition of narrative, the state and event clauses need not appear in temporal order, as the following example shows:

Q: My daddy took my folder.
R: Aw yeah?
Q: He need one, to put,
to go to work with.

Note that this definition of conversational narrative is not as restricted as that of Labov's (1972) "minimum narrative" -- which entails strict temporal ordering of clauses, nor as broad as that of Umiker-Sebeok (1979) which includes single clauses describing past event(s). Labov's narratives were solicited from adolescents and adults by an interviewer. This study is concerned with narratives of three and four-year-olds that emerge within conversation, where the mother, sibling, friend or the investigator act as conversational partner(s). With conversational narratives, the audience plays a major role in the narration -- adding or requesting additional information, initiating, interrupting or even stopping the narrative (e.g. one mother's assertion "That's not important!") A single clause or utterance about a past event, Umiker-Sebeok's definition of narrative, however, seems more appropriate for the talk of even younger children and is much like the "episodes of talk about the past" used by Miller & Sperry (1988) in examining the talk of two-year-olds.

Descriptive Codes

The following descriptive codes are relevant to the first goal of this study, namely to document what these children know about the content, structure, and function of conversational stories of personal experience. These codes are defined in such a way as to permit comparisons with other studies on stories of personal experience. As was the definition of conversational narrative, some of these codes were adapted for this particular age group.

1. Types of Conversational Narrative

While the primary focus of the study was on stories of personal experience, narratives about specific events in the distant past (i.e. prior to the taping session), other forms of narrative that appeared in the children's talk were also coded. Among the other narrative genres were plans or future time narratives about wished-for or anticipated events (Polanyi 1982), fantasy or narratives about imaginary events (e.g a story by Greg about an alligator eating his sister) and hypothetical narratives, what the child would do if a certain situation were to arise. A fifth category of narrative included those that mixed imaginary events or fantasy with events that actually occurred. The definition of narrative used here, however, excluded generic narratives or talk about ongoing or habitually recurring events. In Appendices one through five are examples of each of the five types of narrative identified in this study.

2. Social Functions of Narrative

As discussed in the introduction, Labov's primary functions of narrative are also his primary structural categories: complicating action, orientation and resolution being subsumed under the referential function; evaluation, abstract and coda under evaluation. Evaluation, in this model, is both a primary function, and among the six structural elements. The coda is not only one of the six structural elements, but is "a functional device" (Labov & Waletzky, 1967, p. 39). To be sure, there is a close interconnection between narrative function and structure, but in attempting to "relate the formal properties of narrative to their function", Labov may have obscured the distinction between narrative structure, narrative function and the function of structural elements within a narrative text.

Other scholars have discussed the referential and evaluative aspects of narrative. Ricoeur (1980, pp. 173-174) refers to them as the episodic and configurational *dimensions* of narrative, and their interaction as a fundamental *feature or trait* of narrative. He does not, however, identify either dimension or their interaction as a function of narrative. Labov's definition of narrative function is apparently not the same as the social, communicative or pragmatic function of conversational narrative in the relationship between the narrator and the audience. Labov's definition of evaluation as a function of narrative, says Watson (1973, p. 255), "specifies a relationship between the narrator and the narrative, rather than either between the narrator and his audience, or between the narrative and the audience."

In this study, by narrative *function* I am referring to the social or pragmatic function of narrative, i.e. what the speaker is doing or attempting to do with narrative in the social relationship with his or her audience. Rather than proposing (or imposing) apriori functional categories, examples illustrating the variety of social functions of narratives within this corpus are presented. From these data I have derived three general functions of these narratives.

3. Turns

While identifying narrative as the principle unit of analysis, the "conversational" dimension of conversational narrative was also given consideration in coding. Conversational narratives emerge from turn-by-turn talk, and upon completion (or interruption) re-engage turn-by-turn talk (Jefferson 1978). In most cases the narrative is not completed in a single turn-at-speaking, but is sustained over several turns. The number of turns over which each

narrative extended was recorded. It should be pointed out here that there is disagreement among investigators in defining what constitutes a conversational turn. Some definitions of turn involve the duration of speaker pauses (e.g. Garvey & Berninger 1981). In the "objective approach" appearing in Feldstein & Welkowitz (1978) any unilateral vocalization by a speaker is the beginning of a turn for that speaker, and the turn will include all the vocalisations by that speaker until a different speaker begins to talk. The objective definition, however, treats verbal input by the listener, whose purpose is not to wrest the floor from the speaker, as if it were an actual conversational turn. Many of my verbalisations in the conversation sessions, especially when a child was presenting a narrative, were not to wrest the floor but to signal interest and attention. Duncan & Fiske (1977) define verbal insertions with this intent, such as my "Aw yeah?" in the earlier example, not as turns but "back-channels". For the purposes of this study, a turn was defined as the time from which a speaker began to talk until another person began to talk, excluding interlocutor vocalisations that simply indicated interest and attention.

4. Content Categories

The content categories used in this study are those appearing in Miller & Sperry (1988). Stories of personal experience were placed into four general content categories: negative, positive, ambiguous or other. Positive and negative stories were further subcategorised as involving: physical harm, emotional harm, damage to property, material gain and emotional gain. Stories that seemed to be reports of routine, ordinary occurrences were placed in the *other* category. Nonroutine stories about which there was doubt as to which category they fit were categorised as *ambiguous*. There is a fifth general content category in the Miller & Sperry model for *odd* stories -- those that are about unusual or surprising events that are not noteably positive or negative. None of the stories in this collection, however, were coded as *odd*. In Appendix six there are examples of stories in the negative category -- those of physical harm, emotional harm and damage to property. In Appendix seven there are examples of positive stories -- those of material gain and emotional gain. Examples of *other* and *ambiguous* stories are in Appendix eight.

5. Structural Units

For examining the structural organisation of the narratives in this corpus, the structural formulation appearing in Labov & Waltetsky (1967) and Labov (1972) was chosen. As discussed in the introduction, there were two reasons for using this system. First, this system was developed for describing this particular narrative genre (stories of personal experience) as practiced by black adults. And secondly, this system has been widely used to describe the personal experience stories of children, both mainstream and non-mainstream. This structural formulation consists of six ordered elements to be found in fully developed narratives: abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution and coda. The *abstract* encapsulates the point of the story. The *orientation* provides information regarding time, place, setting and character. The *complication* encodes a temporally-ordered sequence of events that are terminated in a *resolution*. The action in the narrative is temporarily suspended in the *evaluation* segment. While evaluative language may appear throughout the narrative, it tends to be concentrated in a section between the complication and the resolution. The *coda* closes out the story, reconnecting the end of the story with the present. In the Labovian model, evaluation is not only one of the six structural elements in a narrative, it is also one of two primary functions of narrative. In Appendix nine, one of the children's narratives appears with the structural elements marked.

6. Evaluative Devices

As described in the introduction, evaluation in narrative reveals the attitude or affective disposition of the narrator towards the events recounted. In the Labovian model, this evaluative function may be implemented throughout the narrative by means of a variety of structural devices. Miller & Sperry (1988) adapted this notion for stories of very young children. Using the model appearing in Miller & Sperry, evaluative devices for accomplishing the evaluative function were further subcategorized as: (1) intensifiers (e.g. "It rolled *all the way down* there.", "He bit the *whole* leg off."); (2) qualifiers (e.g. "I was *rough.* ", "she was *big.* "); (3) explicit reference to emotion (e.g. "my eye was *hurting.* ", "I just *scared* him."); (4) quoted speech (e.g. "He said, 'don't cut that back on!'", "Then I said, 'Ouch!'"); and (5) comparators (e.g. "I did a cat *like* this." , "He bit me and it *didn't* hurt."). As shown by the very last example, telling what *didn't* happen, comparators include negatives. Negatives compare what occurred with that which did not occur, "expressing the defeat of an expectation that something would happen" (Labov, 1972, p. 381).

Forms of Interlocutor Participation in Children's Stories

This analysis is useful in addressing the second goal of the study, namely to compare stories initiated by the child with those initiated by other people. Emerging during informal conversation with the investigator, narratives in this corpus may have often been facilitated, shaped or "occasioned" (Jefferson, 1978) by the talk of the interlocutor. Even in stories initiated by the child, there was still the verbal interaction with and verbal contribution of the interlocutor, which in effect may be seen as "eliciting" further elaboration by the child. In the conversation sessions, interlocutor participation in children's stories included responses signaling interest and attention, questions based on preceding talk or what Garvey (1979) calls "contingent queries", and prompts for further elaboration.

I have identified six categories of interlocutor participation, drawing on taxonomies proposed by Garvey (1979) and Graesser et al. (1988). These categories can be seen as falling along a continuum in terms of the types of responses they seek. The first three categories include responses signaling interest and requests for clarification (i.e. seeking no response or a repetition of something that was unclear). Category four includes queries to which a limited response (Yes or No) would be appropriate, but could also be responded to with elaboration. Categories five and six request elaboration. The categories are as follows:

1. *Back-Channels :* While brief restatements and clarifications are also considered back-channels (Duncan & Fiske, 1977), in this taxonomy "back-channel" will refer to verbal insertions such as "Um hum", "Aw yeah", "Yeah".
2. *Requests for Clarification :* These are statements indicating that the interlocutor did not hear or understand some portion (or all) of the preceding talk (e.g. "Huh?", "You did what?"). In Garvey's taxonomy of contingent queries, requests of this sort are referred to as "requests for repetition".
3. *Comments :* This category includes brief comments on the child's preceding talk, showing listener interest (e.g. "I bet that was fun.", "I wish I could have gone.", etc.). Also included in this category are simple restatements of preceding talk (not posed as questions).
4. *Requests for Confirmation :* These are requests for the child to confirm or verify an expressed proposition about the child's preceding utterance. This category includes:
   - a.) Simple repetitions or restatements posed as questions (e.g. Child: "I bumped my head." R: "You bumped your head?").
   - b.) Simple requests for confirmation of previous statement (e.g. "He did?", "You didn't?", "Oh, really?").

- c.) Requests for confirmation of interlocutor statements about the preceding child utterance (e.g. Child: "I read it." R: "The book? The one I gave you last week?"). This includes statements or comments with tag questions (e.g. R: "That was fun, wasn't it?").

- d.) Queries beginning with "Did you...", "Were you...", "Was that...", etc. (i.e. that can be answered with a response of yes or no).

These questions are similar to what Graesser et al., refer to as "verification questions", expecting an answer that verifies whether an expressed proposition is true or false.

5. *Requests for Specification :* These are requests for the child to further specify an element (usually an indefinite pronoun) in the preceding utterance (using Who, What, Where, When). An example is:

   Child: I hit him.

   R: Who?

6. *Potential Requests for Elaboration :*

   - a.) *Requests for Orientation* - queries to which an appropriate response would provide information about time, setting or character. Examples of such queries are those beginning with "When...", "Where...", "Who...", "Which...", etc. Unlike *Specifications*, these queries do not request further specification of a particular element already present in the preceding utterance, but request further elaboration of the utterance. The following is an example of such a query:

     Child: I hit him.

     R: When did you do that?

     These requests are similar to what Graesser et al. refer to as "concept completion questions", which request an answer to fill in a "who?", "what?", "where?", or "when?" argument slot of a proposition.

   - b.) *Requests for Complicating Action* - queries to which an appropriate response would be an event clause. Examples of such queries are those beginning with "How did you....", "What happened....", "What did...", etc. These requests include what are referred to as "causal antecedent questions" and "instrumental/procedural questions" in the Graesser et al. taxonomy.

   - c.) *Requests for Explanation* - queries explicitly asking for an explanation. Examples of such queries are those beginning with "Why...", "How come...", etc. This category includes both the "goal orientation questions" and "expectational questions" described by Graesser et al.

RESULTS

The Results section is organized as follows. "Conversational Narratives" provides an overview of the speech samples, the distribution of different types of conversational narratives, and the distribution of conversational narratives by type of interlocutor. Also included is a description of the social functions of these conversational narratives. The remainder of the Results section pertains only to conversational stories of personal experience, and parallels the two main questions of the study: (1) What do children know about the content, structure, and evaluative dimension of conversational stories of personal experience; and (2) How do stories of personal experience initiated by the child compare with those initiated by other people.

Conversational Narratives

Table 1 gives a summary of the speech samples collected and the number of conversational narratives appearing in each sample. This table shows that the sample of 731 minutes (12.18 hours) of child speech yielded a total of 134 narratives. In other words, conversational narratives occurred at an average rate of 11.0 per hour. It can be seen in Table 2 that stories of personal experience emerged as the most frequent narrative category for each of the children, accounting for 76% of the narratives overall. (Among child-initiated narratives, to be discussed later, 81% were stories of personal experience.) The second most frequent category was future plan narratives, accounting for more than 12% of all narratives.

1. Distribution of Conversational Narratives by Type of Interlocutor

The distribution of type of narrative by interlocutor appears in Table 3. In noting the larger proportion of narratives occurring in the conversation sessions that included only the child and the investigator, it should be pointed out that there was not an equal distribution of time among each type of conversation session. Of the 12.18 hours of recorded conversations, 40% of this time was taken in sessions with only the child and the investigator, 16% where the mother was also present, 24% where a sibling was present and 20% where an age-matched friend was involved. But while consuming 40% of the conversation session time, the setting with only the child and investigator yielded 60% of the narratives. It should also be noted, however, that 80% of the second most frequently occurring narrative genre -- future plans -- did not appear in conversation settings with only the child and the investigator, but in those with a sibling, friend or the mother. The setting with the lowest proportion of narratives by the children was that with both the mother and investigator present.

2. Social Functions of Conversational Narratives

This variation in the distribution of narrative type by interlocutor may be attributable to different social functions of these narratives. By social function I am referring to what the speaker is doing or attempting to do with narrative in the social relationship with his or her audience. Labov makes reference to one function of this sort, noting the tendency of narratives in his corpus to place the narrator in the most favorable light, "a function which we may call self-aggrandisement" (Labov & Waletsky 1967:34). But this is but one of many pragmatic functions of narrative in conversation (Robinson, 1981; Stein, 1982). Narrative may have a didactic function, it may serve to entertain, to instigate action, to seek sympathy as well as to seek admiration. The specific function of a narrative or group of narratives is greatly influenced by the composition of the audience, the conversational context, and the emotional concerns of the child at a given point in time.

For example, with an audience of only a sympathetic adult -- the investigator, or the investigator and a sibling, Quinita produced

General Description of Speech Samples				
Child	Mean Age	# of Samples	Total Time	Total Narratives
Greg	4;8	5	117 min	35
Karla	4;1	7	192 min	26
Quinita	3;8	7	199 min	38
David	3;9	4	106 min	18
Calvin	3;7	5	117 min	17
TOTALS		28	731 min	134

Table 1

Types of Conversational Narrative						
Child	SPE	SF	F	FP	HP	Total
Greg	27 (.77)	4 (.11)	1 (.03)	3 (.09)	0 (–)	35
Karla	21 (.81)	3 (.12)	1 (.04)	1 (.04)	0 (–)	26
Quinita	31 (.82)	1 (.03)	1 (.03)	5 (.13)	0 (–)	38
David	12 (.66)	0 (–)	1 (.06)	0 (–)	5 (.28)	18
Calvin	11 (.65)	0 (–)	0 (–)	6 (.35)	0 (–)	17
TOTALS	102 (.76)	8 (.06)	4 (.03)	15 (.12)	5 (.04)	134

Table 2

SPE - Stories of Personal Experience F - Fantasy Story
SF - SPE mixed with some Fantasy FP - Future Plan HP - Hypothetical Plan

Narratives : Distribution by Interlocutor					
Type	w/Inves	w/ Mother	w/ Sibling	w/ Friend	Total
SPE	65 (.64)	7 (.07)	24 (.24)	6 (.06)	102
SF	4 (.50)	0 (–)	3 (.38)	1 (.13)	8
F	4 (1.00)	0 (–)	0 (–)	0 (–)	4
FP	3 (.20)	2 (.13)	4 (.27)	6 (.40)	15
HP	5 (1.00)	0 (–)	0 (–)	0 (–)	5
TOTALS	81 (.60)	9 (.07)	31 (.23)	13 (.10)	134

Table 3

w/Inves - Conversation Session with only the Investigator and the Child
w/Mother - Conversation Session with the Mother, Investigator and the Child
w/Sibling - Conversation Session with a Sibling, Investigator and the Child
w/Friend - Conversation Session with a Friend, Investigator and the Child

15 narratives which appeared to solicit the sympathy of the listener, as they described misfortunes and injustices she's had to endure (being pushed, having things taken away, being afraid, crying, etc.). In these narratives, the narrator isn't just attempting to elicit the interest of her audience, but is actively seeking a particular response (i.e. "Aw, poor Quinita."). Some examples are:

(Referring to a book about alligators that I gave her brother)

Q: He didn't let me see it.
R: He didn't let you see the alligator book? Why not?
Q: He didn't let me read it either.
R: Why not?
Q: My momma told me give it back to him.
R: Yeah? Do you let him see your monkey book?
Q: (nods yes)
R: So you let him read your monkey book?
Q: And he didn't let me read his.
R: Aww. That's not right.
Did you want to read it?
Q: (nods yes)
R: Yeah?
Q: I asked my momma could I read it.
And my momma said no I can't read it.

R: What did you have in it (her Easter basket)?
Q: Candy and suckers.
Tasha 'nim ate all of my suckers.
R: They ate all your suckers?
Q: I don't got no more left.
R: Did you get any?
Q: (shakes head no)
R: They ate them up from you?
Q: I had gave they one.
And they said they want one.
R: Uh huh.
Q: And I told they wouldn't give it back. And they won't.

Q: Greg ran me over then I had two sores on my leg, and it was bleeding!

However, when the audience included Calvin, a male class-mate, no such narratives occurred. In that setting, Quinita produced narratives explicitly referring to herself as a "big girl". In the exchange of non-narrative talk and future plan narratives in that setting, Quinita even interrupted Calvin's future plan narrative involving his driving her home, to assert her status as a big girl who could plan her own affairs: "No you ain't! I got a car! I'm on get in my own car. My momma gone buy it for me."

Showing that she was a big girl, competent in managing her affairs was also evident in the narratives of Karla in conversation sessions with the investigator only, and in those including a friend. Karla presented stories in which she cooked, read books, fixed bicycles, fixed televisions and went to the store, "all by herself". Karla's most elaborate and lengthy narrative, however, seemed to have the function of entertainment or affirming the relationship with the investigator. . The investigator had brought Karla a book about a gorilla on one occasion, a book about cats on another, and had also brought some toy food for one of her class-mates. Karla apparently assumed these to be topics of great interest for the investigator. Quite unexpectedly, during a conversation session in which I asked about a recent trip to the zoo, Karla presented the longest narrative in the corpus -- a 74 clause fantasy story about monkeys, that involved reading cat books and cooking food (as well as monkeys wearing glasses, ironing clothes, drinking beer and going to the bathroom) -- all of which was very effective in entertaining her audience.

Whatever the composition of the audience, Greg provided narratives making it clear that he was strong, unafraid and able to physically take care of himself. There are narratives in which he explicitly refers not only to himself as protagonist in the narrative as being "rough" (e.g. "I pushed him down too. And I was rough."), but to himself as narrator as being "rough" (e.g. "... I'm rough. And I just body slammed him."). Through these and other narratives Greg attempted to show his audience that he possessed many of the culturally valued qualities for male adults. His narratives not only show him to be rough,

but tell of him defending his "girlfriend" (who he says is also "rough" in her own right). This roughness endures beyond the context of fights. Greg begins a narrative with, "I got a shot, didn't even start crying."

Calvin and David, each a year younger than Greg, also present narratives indicating their toughness. They particularly expressed a willingness to "beat up" potentially threatening or scary things that appeared in books or came up in our conversations, such as snakes, bears or sharks. But in conversation sessions with only the investigator, Calvin and David each admitted to being scared or hurt on occasion. And just as Karla often used narrative as a means of playful interaction with the audience, Calvin, Greg and especially David also told stories for joking with or attempting to trick their audience. Calvin was in effect teasing or joking with his adult audience when presenting the unexpected (and unwanted by his mother) focus in his narrative recounting his visit to the fire station.

This is only a brief sketch of some of the functions of narratives in this corpus. While the specific narrative functions vary widely with child and conversational setting, some general functions of narratives (within this collection) seem to emerge. I have identified three. Not all of the narratives have all of the general functions, but most of the narratives have at least one of these functions. The functions are: (1) The narratives present or share some meaningful experience. (2) Through this presentation, a culturally valued aspect (or aspects) of the child is identified and affirmed. And (3) the exchange of conversational narratives serves to maintain or enhance the relationship between narrator and audience. The functions of the narratives are not exclusively for the audience, but are for the narrator as well. The presenting of aspects of one's self through narrative can be seen as a semiritualized way of reaffirming one's personal identity in terms of socially sanctioned values (Robinson, 1981, p.64). The retrieval of the individual's "potentialities" from past experiences into the present, is what Ricoeur (1980, pp.179-182) suggests may be the function of narrative -- "or at least a selected group of narratives".

For three and four-year-olds, however, there is not a lot of past to retrieve. In these narratives, stories of personal experience are occasionally "enriched" with fantasy, and as seen in Table 1, second to stories of personal experience, future plan stories were the most frequently occurring. For such young children, the "potentialities" still ahead may surpass those in the past. Of the future plan narratives in this study, 80% occurred in conversation sessions including a sibling, friend or the mother -- those who were already knowledgeable about much of the child's past. For children so young with an audience aware of much of their past, Ricoeur's (1980, p.182) assertion that through narrative the hero "is who he was" might be changed to the hero "is who he will be".

Conversational Stories of Personal Experience

The remainder of the results pertain only to conversational stories of personal experience, the most frequent single narrative category in this corpus. This section is organised according to several descriptive categories (length and rate, content, structure, and evaluative devices). Also, in order to anticipate the issue of child vs. other-initiated stories, which will be taken up in more detail later, each of these descriptive categories will be examined with respect to child-initiation.

1. Length and Rate of Stories of Personal Experience

The 102 stories of personal experience in this corpus of narratives had an average length of 7.09 clauses (with a maximum of 20 clauses), and were sustained over an average of 4.23 turns (with a maximum of 11 turns). Tables 4 and 5 give a breakdown by child and interlocutor of clauses per story of personal experience, and clauses per turn. Tables 6 and 7 show that stories of personal experience occurred at a rate of 8.37 per hour (with child-initiated stories occurring at 4.51 per hour). In these tables it can be seen that the conversation sessions with only the child and

SPE : Clauses Per Story					
Child	w/Inves	w/ Mother	w/ Sibling	w/ Friend	Overall
Greg	11.73	NA	7.67	NA	8.15
Karla	8.47	4.00	NA	6.50	7.86
Quinita	6.17	3.67	5.00	8.50	5.77
David	8.42	NA	NA	--	8.42
Calvin	4.43	9.50	--	4.00	5.27
OVERALL	7.94	6.33	5.46	6.33	7.09

Table 4

SPE : Clauses Per Turn					
Child	w/Inves	w/ Mother	w/ Sibling	w/ Friend	Overall
Greg	2.39	NA	1.47	NA	1.90
Karla	2.09	0.47	NA	1.30	1.72
Quinita	1.91	0.92	1.14	1.55	1.54
David	2.59	NA	NA	--	2.59
Calvin	0.97	0.70	--	2.00	0.92
OVERALL	2.05	0.68	1.35	1.52	1.68

Table 5

SPE : Rates Per Hour					
Child	w/Inves	w/ Mother	w/ Sibling	w/ Friend	Overall
Greg	17.37	NA	12.15	NA	13.85
Karla	10.20	1.64	NA	6.32	6.56
Quinita	22.04	10.00	6.08	2.26	9.35
David	8.57	NA	NA	0.00	6.79
Calvin	21.00	5.22	0.00	2.14	5.64
AVERAGE	15.84	4.51	6.08	2.68	8.37

Table 6

SPE (Child-Initiated): Rates Per Hour					
Child	w/Inves	w/ Mother	w/ Sibling	w/ Friend	Overall
Greg	11.05	NA	7.60	NA	8.72
Karla	5.40	0.00	NA	3.16	3.13
Quinita	15.92	0.00	3.80	1.13	5.73
David	5.00	NA	NA	0.00	3.96
Calvin	6.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.03
AVERAGE	8.67	0.00	3.80	0.79	4.51

Table 7

investigator yielded the longest stories on average and the highest rate of occurrence of stories of personal experience. In the sessions with both the mother and investigator present there were no child-initiated stories of personal experience (the only child-initiated narrative in that setting was a future plan). While stories of personal experience occurring in that setting had an average length of 6.33 clauses, these stories had only 0.68 clauses per turn -- indicating short responses to elicitations.

2. Content of Stories of Personal Experience

As has been shown in an earlier section, it is not possible to determine the social function of narratives without first having access to their content. While by function I referred to what children do or attempt to do socially with narrative, by content I am referring to what it is children actually talk about. While there was wide variation in content or theme among specific narratives -- wrestling and fighting, receiving gifts, bravely enduring painful or threatening situations, going on trips or outings -- I coded the stories of personal experience into the four general content categories and five subcategories used in Miller & Sperry (1988).

Tables 8 and 9 show the distribution of stories of personal experience among the four general content categories. There was a slight skewing among the child-initiated stories in the direction of "negative" content. An example of such a negative story (belonging to the "physical harm" negative story subcategory) follows:

Q: Greg ran me over
then I had two sores on my leg,
and it was bleeding!

Examples from the other negative story subcategories appear in Appendix 6.

There were also fewer stories of "other" (routine) or "ambiguous" content among those stories that were child-initiated. The following is an example of a story categorized as "other" (a story about routine, ordinary events):

Q: My momma was, uh, at, at her house.
And my momma said she,
see us later at church.

Stories categorized as "ambiguous" were those about non-routine events, but it was not clear whether the events were positive or negative. In the following example, the child gave no indication of his affective disposition toward novel events.

(Pointing to photographs of
snakes in a book)

C: My momma took me see that snake.

R: Where?

C: Right here.
(Pointing to snakes in book)
Then she took me to the other
snakes,
right here and right here.

The distribution of positive and negative stories among their subcategories is shown in Tables 10 and 11. These tables, as do those of the general categories, reveal the wide variation between children in story content. But while negative stories were the largest general content category among child initiated stories of personal experience, the largest subcategory was positive -- emotional gain. These figures along with the wide variation in narrative content between children do not seem to strongly support findings (e.g as reported in Ames, 1966; Pitcher & Prelinger, 1963; and Miller & Sperry, 1988) of aggression or violence being the single most frequent theme in children's stories at this age.

These findings, however, appear to be consistent with the discussion on narrative function. We see, for example, that 55% of Quinita's stories of personal experience (58% of those that were child-initiated) were negative, the most frequent subcategory for her was emotional harm. (This subcategory includes stories in which a person's feelings are hurt, is frightened, has possessions taken, etc.)

Content of Stories of Personal Experience					
Child	Negative	Positive	Other	Ambiguous	Total
Greg	13 (.48)	10 (.37)	2 (.07)	2 (.07)	27
Karla	7 (.33)	13 (.62)	0 (–)	1 (.05)	21
Quinita	17 (.55)	9 (.29)	3 (.09)	2 (.07)	31
David	4 (.33)	7 (.58)	0 (–)	1 (.08)	12
Calvin	3 (.27)	4 (.36)	3 (.27)	1 (.09)	11
TOTALS	44 (.43)	43 (.42)	8 (.08)	7 (.07)	102

Table 8

Content of Stories of Personal Experience (*Child-Initiated*)					
Child	Negative	Positive	Other	Ambiguous	Total
Greg	9 (.53)	5 (.29)	2 (.11)	1 (.06	17
Karla	3 (.30)	7 (.70)	0 (–)	0 (–)	10
Quinita	11 (.58)	6 (.32)	1 (.05)	1 (.05)	19
David	3 (.43)	4 (.57)	0 (–)	0 (–)	7
Calvin	1 (.50)	1 (.50)	0 (–)	0 (–)	2
TOTALS	27 (.49)	23 (.41)	3 (.06)	2 (.04)	55

Table 9

Content of Stories of Personal Experience						
Child	Negative			Positive		Total
	Physical Harm	Emotional Harm	Property Damage	Material Gain	Emotional Gain	SPE
Greg	12 (.44)	1 (.04)	0 (–)	2 (.07)	8 (.30)	27
Karla	7 (.33)	0 (–)	0 (–)	2 (.10)	11 (.53)	21
Quinita	5 (.16)	9 (.29)	3 (.10)	2 (.06)	7 (.23)	31
David	3 (.25)	1 (.08)	0 (–)	2 (.16)	5 (.42)	12
Calvin	3 (.27)	0 (–)	0 (–)	0 (–)	4 (.36)	11
TOTALS	30 (.29)	11 (.11)	3 (.03)	8 (.08)	35 (.34)	102

Table 10

Content of Stories of Personal Experience (*Child-Initiated*)						
Child	Negative			Positive		Total
	Physical Harm	Emotional Harm	Property Damage	Material Gain	Emotional Gain	SPE
Greg	8 (.47)	1 (.06)	0 (–)	2 (.12)	3 (.18)	17
Karla	3 (.30)	0 (–)	0 (–)	0 (–)	7 (.70)	10
Quinita	3 (.16)	6 (.32)	2 (.11)	1 (.05)	5 (.26)	19
David	2 (.29)	1 (.14)	0 (–)	2 (.29)	2 (.29)	7
Calvin	1 (.50)	0 (–)	0 (–)	0 (–)	1 (.50)	2
TOTALS	17 (.31)	8 (.15)	2 (.04)	5 (.09)	18 (.33)	55

Table 11

Conversely, 62% of Karla's stories (70% of those that were child-initiated) were positive, and the largest subcategory was emotional gain. It would appear from these tables that only for Greg were stories with a theme of aggression or violence clearly the most frequently told. For Greg, the single most frequent subcategory was physical harm. For both Calvin and David there was a balance between physical harm and emotional gain as most frequently occurring subcategories of stories of personal experience.

The coded content categories, however, were only applied to stories of personal experience. Missing from the tables is that four out of the five hypothetical plan narratives involved aggression, violence and physical harm. Also not shown is a recurrent theme among future plan narratives which would have trouble fitting a specific content category. While there were future plan narratives about wished-for positive events and material possessions, a common future plan theme involved the child's identification with or emulation of mature adult roles and relationships. Greg and Quinita presented one such narrative in which they not only looked forward to the authority and control afforded by attaining parent status, they also revealed an expectation of a reversal of roles with their parents:

G: When she grow up,
she gone be a momma.
R: Who?
G: Quinita.
R: Yeah?
G: When I grow up,
then I'm gone be a daddy.
R: Oh yeah?
G: She gone be the wife
and I'm gone be the fath,
and I'm be the husband.

.
.
.

G: My daddy gone be little,
my momma gone be the daughter,
and my daddy gone be the son.
R: Oh really? When you get big
they're gone get little? (laugh)
G: Nobody not gone play with,
now they gone be a kid.
R: Really?
G: And I'll be beating buts,
if they go outside, I'm gone
beat they buts.
R: You gone beat their buts?
Q: I'm gone be a momma
then I'll beat my kids buts.
R: When you be a momma you gone
beat your kids buts?
Q: Yep.
R: Are you gone be real nice to
your kids, or are you gone
whip their buts?
G: If they go outside,
I'm gone tell them get they big
wheels and ride it, "and don't
let nobody ride. And I mean that."

3. Structure of Stories of Personal Experience

Having looked at what was said in these narratives and what was done socially through their telling, there remains the issue of their structural organisation. A narrative's structure is what enables its content to be communicated and its social function to be carried out. Using the structural formulation appearing in Labov & Waletzky (1967) and Labov (1972), the distribution of stories of personal experience in this corpus by the number of structural elements they contained is shown in Table 12. The figures in this table represent *types of element* per narrative, not the overall number of elements found. A narrative with two orientations and two complications, for example, would have been scored as having only one of each of these structural types, i.e. it would have been coded as having two elements. This table shows that stories of personal experience had, on average, 2.5 structural elements.

According to Labov & Waletzky (1967), it is uncommon for all six structural elements to occur in the narratives of other than mature speakers. There were narratives in this collection, however, in which all six elements

Structural Elements Per Narrative (SPE)							
Child	Number of Elements						Average Elements
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Greg	4 (.15)	9 (.33)	8 (.30)	5 (.19)	1 (.04)	0 (--)	2.63
Karla	5 (.24)	5 (.24)	5 (.24)	4 (.19)	1 (.05)	1 (.05)	2.71
Quinita	9 (.29)	13 (.42)	3 (.10)	4 (.13)	1 (.03)	1 (.03)	2.29
David	1 (.08)	5 (.42)	3 (.25)	2 (.17)	1 (.08)	0 (--)	2.75
Calvin	5 (.73)	4 (.09)	2 (.18)	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)	1.73
TOTALS	24 (.24)	36 (.35)	21 (.21)	15 (.15)	4 (.04)	2 (.02)	2.46

Table 12

* Distribution of Structural Elements Among Narratives (SPE)					
Child	Abstract	Orientation	Eval	Resolution	Coda
Greg	9 (.33)	10 (.37)	20 (.74)	5 (.19)	2 (.07)
Karla	6 (.28)	15 (.71)	18 (.86)	3 (.14)	4 (.19)
Quinita	8 (.26)	19 (.61)	22 (.71)	3 (.10)	3 (.10)
David	3 (.25)	9 (.75)	11 (.92)	3 (.25)	1 (.08)
Calvin	1 (.09)	5 (.46)	9 (.82)	1 (.09)	1 (.09)
TOTALS	27 (.27)	58 (.57)	80 (.78)	15 (.15)	11 (.11)

Table 13

* There is no *complication* category because by definition, each narrative must contain one such structural element.

Structural Elements Per Other-Initiated SPE							
Child	Number of Elements						Average Elements
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Greg	2 (.20)	3 (.30)	3 (.30)	2 (.20)	0 (--)	0 (--)	2.50
Karla	5 (.46)	2 (.18)	3 (.27)	0 (--)	0 (--)	1 (.09)	2.18
Quinita	5 (.42)	7 (.58)	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)	1.58
David	1 (.20)	3 (.60)	1 (.20)	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)	2.00
Calvin	5 (.56)	3 (.33)	1 (.11)	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)	1.56
TOTALS	18 (.38)	18 (.38)	8 (.17)	2 (.04)	0 (--)	1 (.02)	1.96

Table 14

Structural Elements Per Child-Initiated SPE							
Child	Number of Elements						Average Elements
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Greg	2 (.12)	6 (.35)	5 (.29)	3 (.17)	1 (.06)	0 (--)	2.71
Karla	0 (--)	3 (.30)	2 (.20)	4 (.40)	1 (.10)	0 (--)	3.30
Quinita	4 (.21)	6 (.32)	3 (.16)	4 (.21)	1 (.05)	1 (.05)	2.74
David	0 (--)	2 (.29)	2 (.29)	2 (.29)	1 (.14)	0 (--)	3.29
Calvin	0 (--)	1 (.50)	1 (.50)	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)	2.50
TOTALS	6 (.11)	18 (.33)	13 (.24)	13 (.24)	4 (.07)	1 (.02)	2.89

Table 15

appeared. These narratives comprised only 2% of the total corpus, though, and didn't have each structural element in the canonical order presented by Labov (i.e. appearing in the order of abstract first, then orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution and coda).

The distribution by type of structural element among stories of personal experience in this corpus is shown in Table 13. Note that every story contains, by definition, a complication. We see from this table that evaluation and orientation were the second and third most frequently occurring structural elements both overall and for each individual child.

In Tables 14 and 15, which provide a comparison of child-initiated and other-initiated story distribution by number of structural elements, we see that for each child in the study, child-initiated stories tended to have more structural elements. Tables 16 and 17, comparing child-initiated and other-initiated stories by distribution of structural elements, offer further evidence of the greater structural complexity of child-initiated stories. We see that 42% of child-initiated stories contained an abstract, compared to only 8% of the other-initiated stories. Child-initiated stories also more frequently contained orientation and evaluation elements.

4. Evaluative Devices in Stories of Personal Experience

Looking more closely at the evaluative elements, among child-initiated stories of personal (and specifically not vicarious) experience, 90% contained at least one evaluative device. The most frequently occurring evaluative devices were comparators, which were included in 60% of the stories, and intensifiers, appearing in 53% of the stories. The most frequently used specific comparators were negatives -- telling what did *not* happen, or comparing what occurred with that which did not occur. Negatives appeared in 51% of the stories of personal experience. Among the other comparators in these narratives were modals: "That boy, he, I *ought* to beat that boy up.", and conditional statements: (referring to snakes seen at the zoo) " *If they was out,* I'd be scared of them.".

Within several narratives, there was not only the use of negatives, but the combination of negatives with explicit reference to emotion. In nineteen narratives (thirteen stories of personal experience) there were instances of the child talking of not crying, not being scared, or not hurting. This particular combination of elements appeared in narratives attempting to present the protagonist as having adult-like qualities, able to handle or overcome adversity. The beginning (and abstract) of a narrative by Greg illustrated this combination: "I got a shot, didn't even start crying.", as did Karla's: "He bite me and it didn't even hurt.". In each of these examples there was not only the negative "didn't" and the explicit references to emotion "crying" and "hurt", but also an intensifier "even". David, whose narratives had on average the most structural elements, presented one of these combinations of elements in a narrative containing four of the five evaluative devices listed earlier, and five of the six structural elements (evaluative devices are underlined):

D: When we went to the fire station,
uh, Timothy start crying!

R: At the fire station? How come?

D: 'Cause they made that noise.
As the fire truck be going,
but it didn't even go.
It sat right in there.
And then he made that noise,
the boss. Who the, who the boss?

R: The fire chief?...

D: Yeah, he cut the fire on, uh,
and then, Timothy start crying.

R: (laugh) He got scared.
You weren't scared?

D: I didn't even cry.

R: Yeah? I bet that was scarey though.

Distribution of Structural Elements Among Stories of Personal Experience *
Child vs. Other-Initiated

Distribution of Structural Elements (Elicited)					
Child	Abstract	Orientation	Eval	Resolution	Coda
Greg	1 (.10)	3 (.30)	6 (.60)	3 (.30)	1 (.10)
Karla	1 (.09)	6 (.55)	9 (.82)	1 (.09)	2 (.18)
Quinita	2 (.17)	8 (.67)	7 (.58)	0 (–)	0 (–)
David	0 (–)	2 (.40)	5 (1.0)	0 (–)	1 (.20)
Calvin	0 (–)	3 (.33)	8 (.89)	1 (.11)	1 (.11)
TOTALS	4 (.08)	22 (.47)	35 (.75)	5 (.11)	5 (.11)

Table 16

Distribution of Structural Elements (Spontaneous)					
Child	Abstract	Orientation	Eval	Resolution	Coda
Greg	8 (.47)	7 (.41)	14 (.82)	2 (.12)	1 (.06)
Karla	5 (.50)	9 (.90)	9 (.90)	2 (.20)	2 (.20)
Quinita	6 (.32)	11 (.58)	15 (.79)	3 (.16)	3 (.16)
David	3 (.43)	7 (1.0)	6 (.86)	3 (.43)	0 (–)
Calvin	1 (.50)	2 (1.0)	1 (.50)	0 (–)	0 (–)
TOTALS	23 (.42)	36 (.65)	45 (.82)	10 (.18)	6 (.11)

Table 17

* There is no *complication* category because by definition, each narrative must contain one such structural element.

They turned that, that siren on.
Is that what it was, the siren?

D: Yup. He start crying.
He said don't cut it back on
after he start crying.
Naw, he said, he was crying first,
then he said,
"Don't cut that back on!"
(In high pitched voice)

Within this corpus of narratives some evaluative devices were used which Labov said were beyond the syntactic range of younger narrators. One such device, in Labov's category of correlatives (Labov, 1972, pp.387-389) is the double attributive. Some examples of the double attributive (adherent adjectives) taken from this corpus are: "Dominoes Pizza got some BIG GIANT peppers!" and "They got *little bitty tiny* coats.". The second example may even be considered a triple attributive. There were six narratives using correlatives. The use of such a variety of evaluative devices, and the frequent use of other structural elements, indicate that these three and four-year-olds have at their disposal the means for communicating quite effectively with conversational narratives.

Child-Initiated vs. Other-Initiated Stories of Personal Experience

Throughout this study, analyses of the attributes of narratives in this corpus have made comparisons of those attributes in narratives initiated by the child vs. those initiated by others in the conversation session. Table 18 gives a summary of some of these comparisons. Child-initiated narratives were on average longer, more frequently contained evaluative devices, were less often of ambiguous or routine content, and tended to be more structurally complex (in terms of their average number of structural elements). Moreover, child-initiated stories of personal experience were not only more structurally complex on average, this pattern applied to each of the individual children. These findings are consistent with those of Miller & Sperry (1988) that the most effective narratives are generated out of the child's own emotional concerns, and those of Casden (1970, p.47) that greater personal involvement in the topic increases the likelihood of structural complexity.

Forms of Interlocutor Participation in Children's Stories

Earlier, the importance of the contributions of the audience or interlocutor to conversational narratives was emphasised. Given the expressed intention of the investigator to be a "good audience" -- i.e. to facilitate informal talk in the vernacular -- did forms of interlocutor participation influence the observed differences between stories initiated by the child and those initiated by others? Were the children more frequently called upon, through more investigator prompts or queries, to draw out or elaborate stories they initiated themselves? In other words, in attempting to be a "good audience", was the investigator an "even better audience" for the child-initiated stories? Were investigator responses to other-initiated stories more passive? Or could it be that the various forms of interlocutor participation in both child and other-initiated stories were strongly influenced by the talk of the child? These questions point to the need for systematically identifying and examining the forms of interlocutor participation -- the conversational constituents of a "good audience" -- in this corpus of narratives.

Table 19 provides a summary of the forms of interlocutor participation in the children's narratives. There is a strong similarity in the proportions of forms of interlocutor participation between child-initiated and other-initiated stories except in the very top and bottom categories, which represent, as mentioned earlier, end points of a continuum in terms of types of responses required. There was a higher frequency of interlocutor back-channels in child-initiated stories than in other-initiated stories. Back-channels,

Summary Comparison of Child vs. Other-Initiated Stories of Personal Experience		
	Child-Init	Other-Init
Total Stories of Personal Experience	55	47
Clauses per Story	7.42	6.70
Clauses per Turn	1.77	1.58
Rate per Hour	4.51	3.86
% with Negative Content	.49	.36
% with Positive Content	.41	.43
% with Ambiguous/Other Content	.10	.21
% with Evaluative Device(s)	.82	.75
% with Abstract	.42	.08
% with Orientation	.65	.47
% with Resolution	.18	.11
% with Coda	.11	.11
Structural Elements per Story	2.89	1.96

Table 18

Forms of Interlocutor Participation						
Form	Child-Initiated			Other-Initiated		
	Turns	%	%	Turns	%	%
1. Back-channel	81	.27		53	.21	
2. Clarification Request	15	.05		9	.04	
3. Comment	18	.06		14	.06	
4. Confirmation Request			.40			.40
a. Repetition	27	.09		18	.07	
b. Conf Prior Statemt	2	.01		5	.02	
c. Conf Interloc Statemt	30	.10		22	.09	
d. Verification Query	63	.21		54	.22	
5. Specification Request	9	.03		3	.01	
6. Elaboration Request			.20			.29
a. Orientation Request	33	.11		20	.08	
b. Complication Request	15	.05		45	.18	
c. Explanation Request	12	.04		7	.03	

Table 19

(The turns in the table are interlocutor turns-at-speaking.)

signaling interlocutor attention and interest, seek no particular response from the child. At the other end of the continuum, there was a higher frequency of requests for elaboration in other-initiated stories. The difference was particularly acute in category 6b. -- requests for complicating action. This was the form of interlocutor participation showing the greatest difference of all in frequency of occurrence between child-initiated and other-initiated stories. Complication requests are queries to which an appropriate response would be an event clause. These requests include what Graesser et al. (1988) refer to as "causal antecedent questions" and "instrumental procedural questions". Appropriate answers to such questions would add to narrative length.

As back-channels and complication requests were the forms of interlocutor participation showing the greatest dissimilarities in their distribution between child-initiated and other-initiated stories, it might be useful to take a closer look at the relationships between these forms of interlocutor talk and the children's stories. Table 20 shows, by child, the relationship between interlocutor back-channels and child turns-at-speaking. Even though for three of the five children there were more back-channels per turn in other-initiated stories, overall there were more interlocutor back-channels per child turn in child-initiated stories. In child-initiated stories there appeared to be an increase in the frequency of interlocutor back-channeling per turn with increasing child age (the tables are arranged by age with the oldest child at the top). The graphic accompanying Table 20 illustrates this tendency. This increased frequency of interlocutor back-channeling with older children might indicate that back-channeling is a characteristic of verbal interaction between more mature conversational partners. David, the most fluent or productive story-teller (i.e. the child whose stories have the most clauses per turn and most total clauses on average) did not receive the most back-channels per turn. David received the second fewest back-channels per turn, and is the second youngest child in the study.

This age-related pattern for interlocutor back-channeling did not appear in other-initiated stories. In some instances there were some striking differences between back-channels per turn in child-initiated stories compared to other-initiated stories. For Karla there was much more back-channeling per turn in child-initiated stories than in other-initiated stories -- a difference of .28. The opposite was the case for David, for whom there was more back-channeling in other-initiated stories.

Table 21 shows, by child, the relationship between interlocutor complication requests and child turns-at-speaking. Looking at the two means of complication requests per turn, we see a pronounced difference between child-initiated and other-initiated stories -- a difference of .16. Not only did interlocutor complication requests occur more frequently in other-initiated stories overall, they occurred more frequently in other-initiated stories for each child. This pattern is shown clearly in the graphic accompanying Table 21. The table and graphic, however, not only show these differences between child-initiated and other-initiated stories, they also show a similarity in the pattern of complication requests per child turn within each group of stories. For example, it is shown that David (D in the graphic) received the least complication requests per turn in both child-initiated and other-initiated stories. Quinita (Q in the graphic), on the other hand, received the most complication requests per turn in both types of stories. This consistent pattern suggests that frequency of interlocutor complication requests, like back-channeling, may also be linked to specific characteristics of the relationship between the conversational partners (i.e. the child and the investigator). David, as noted earlier, was the most productive speaker, in terms of clauses per turn and clauses per narrative, was assertive and outspoken. Quinita, however, was fourth (i.e. next to last) in clauses per turn and clauses per narrative, was soft-spoken, shy and sympathy-seeking in her relationship with the investigator.

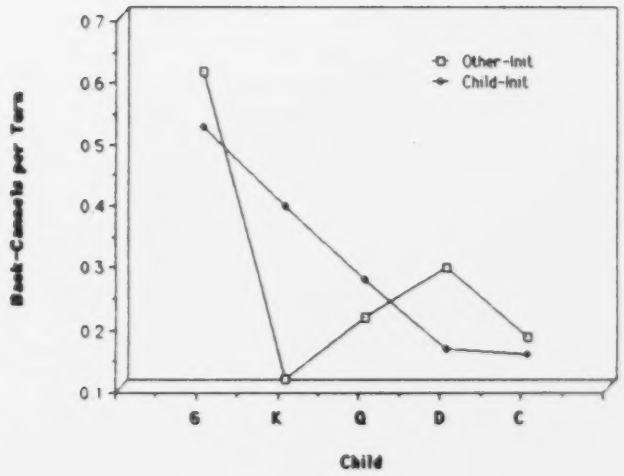
These data offer further evidence of relatively consistent patterns of interlocutor participation for individual children. As shown earlier, for Karla there were .28 more back-channels per turn in child-initiated

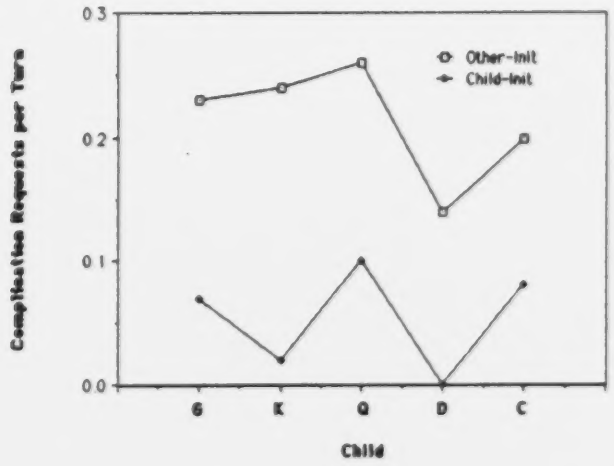
Interlocutor Back-Channels per Child Turn						
Child	Child-Initiated			Other-Initiated		
	Turns	B-C	B-C/Turn	Turns	B-C	B-C/Turn
Greg	73	38	.52	43	26	.61
Karla	41	16	.39	55	6	.11
Quinita	78	21	.27	38	8	.21
David	25	4	.16	14	4	.29
Calvin	13	2	.15	50	9	.18
Overall	230	81	.35	200	53	.27

Table 20

Interlocutor Complication Requests per Child Turn						
Child	Child-Initiated			Other-Initiated		
	Turns	C R	C R/Turn	Turns	C R	C R/Turn
Greg	73	5	.07	43	10	.23
Karla	41	1	.02	55	13	.24
Quinita	78	8	.10	38	10	.26
David	25	0	.00	14	2	.14
Calvin	13	1	.08	50	10	.20
Overall	230	15	.07	200	45	.23

Table 21





stories than in other-initiated stories. With Karla there was not only the strongest bias toward back-channels in child-initiated stories, there was also the strongest bias toward complication requests in other-initiated stories. For Karla there were .22 more complication requests per turn in other-initiated stories than in child-initiated stories. Table 22 and the accompanying graphic show, by child, the differences between back-channels in child and other-initiated stories per turn, and in complication requests in other and child-initiated stories per turn. It is shown that where there was a comparatively strong bias toward back-channels in child-initiated stories, there was a comparatively strong bias toward complication requests in other-initiated stories.

The finding of regularities and consistent patterns in forms of interlocutor participation for individual children indicates that interlocutor talk may not only elicit or "cause" subsequent child talk, but may itself be elicited or "caused" by utterances of the child. Certain child utterances can occasion specific interlocutor queries. For example, child utterances expressing a negative "psychological" state (Garvey, 1979, p.371) occasion queries concerning the cause or reason for that negative state, or "causal antecedent" questions (Graesser et al., 1988). The following is an example of such a query from this corpus of narratives:

> Quinita: And I cried at the carnival too.
> R: You cried at the carnival? Why?

Given the earlier finding that the largest story content subcategory for Quinita was "negative - emotional harm", it should not be surprising that for Quinita there was a high frequency of interlocutor requests for explanations for these negative feelings.

Similarly, child-initiated stories, especially those told by more mature speakers, may occasion back-channeling from a conversational partner. It may well be that the abundant interlocutor back-channeling during the children's narrations was not simply a behavioral idiosyncrasy of the investigator, but a pervasive pattern of communication in black communities. According to Smitherman (1986) and Abrahams and Gay (1972), such back-channeling or "co-signing" represents a typical call-response pattern of black vernacular talk, and reflects the highly interactive and interdependent character of talk in black communities. Active participation is expected of the listener. Forms of interlocutor participation, it appears, may be sensitive to culture as well as context.

This examination of interlocutor participation in this corpus of narratives has shown requests for complicating action occurring more frequently in other-initiated than in child-initiated stories. Although the difference was less pronounced, there was also a tendency for back-channels to occur more frequently in child-initiated stories. There was no evidence either overall or in the case of any child of more frequent queries to draw out child-initiated stories, or of greater interlocutor passivity during other-initiated stories. These findings suggest that: (1) There was more of an interactional rather than causal relationship between the verbal contributions of the child and interlocutor; and (2) Interlocutor participation not only influenced, but was influenced by the talk of the child. When a child initiated a story, the interlocutor indicated interest and attentiveness, which supported the unfolding of the story. When the interlocutor initiated the story, responses were not as long or detailed, prompting the interlocutor to ask for further elaboration.

DISCUSSION

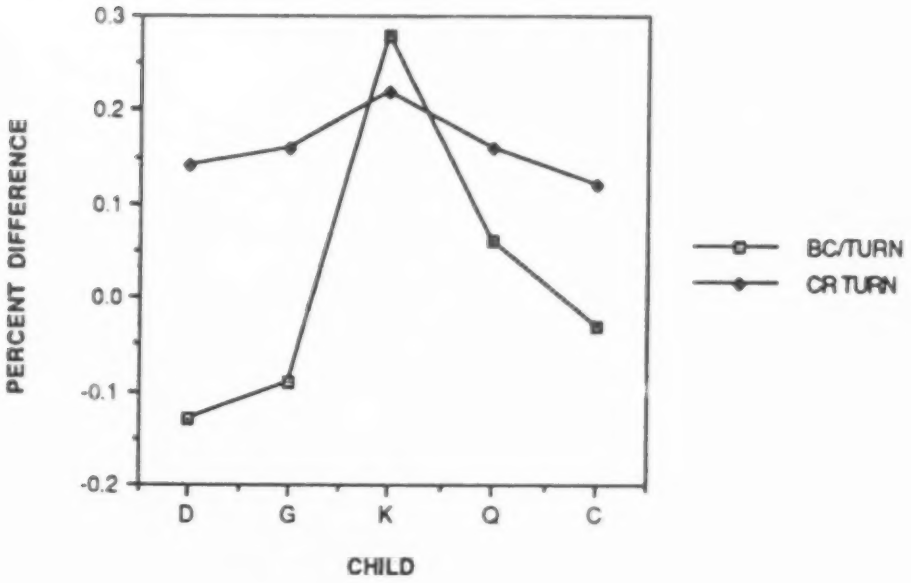
This paper examined conversational narratives of preschool-aged children in a black low-income community on Chicago's Near West Side. Like many other Afro-American communities, this is a community in which personal storytelling is widely and vigorously practiced.* Informal conversation

* I can make this claim with confidence having lived, worked and over the past few years conducted ethnographic research in this community.

Differences in Back-Channels per Child Turn
Between Child and Other-Initiated Stories
And
Differences in Complication Requests per Child Turn
Between Other and Child-Initiated Stories

Child	Child-Init - Other-Init		Other-Init - Child-Init	
	B-C/Turn	Rank	C R/Turn	Rank
Greg	-.09	4	+.16	2.5
Karla	+.28	1	+.22	1
Quinita	+.06	2	+.16	2.5
David	-.13	5	+.14	4
Calvin	-.03	3	+.12	5
Mean	+.08		+.16	

Table 22



sessions with three- and four-year-old children, in a relaxed, familiar setting provided a glimpse at inchoate forms of this genre of talk that flourishes among adult speakers. In just over 12 hours of taped conversation sessions, 134 narratives were recorded, 76% of which were stories of personal experience. The stories of personal experience had an average of about 7 clauses and extended over 4 turns-at-speaking. There was an average of 2.5 narrative structural elements in each story of personal experience, and 79% of these stories had at least one device for evaluating the events recounted. A few of the narratives in this corpus contained all six structural elements, which has been considered a feature of narratives of more mature speakers. While the largest number of narratives (by a slight margin) referred to negative experiences, there was variation in the content of narratives of each child, and great variation in content between children. Moreover, these children, when engaged in informal conversation, frequently and effectively used narratives, often of considerable complexity, in communicating a variety of experiences and sustaining a social relationship.

Of the five types of narrative identified in this study, stories of personal experience were by far the most frequently occurring narrative genre overall (76%) and for each individual child. Future plan narratives were the second most frequent genre (12%). These findings of a greater proportion of stories of personal experience is in strong agreement with those of Preece (1987). In a study involving five-year-olds, Preece found "anecdotes of personal experience" comprising 52% of the corpus of narratives. Combined with "anecdotes of vicarious experience", stories about the past comprised 72% of that corpus.

The findings in this study on the length of stories of personal experience (averaging 7.1 clauses) are very similar to those of Peterson & McCabe (1983), who's subjects were white working-class children in the Midwest. The average story length of the four-year-olds in the Peterson & McCabe study was 7.0 clauses (6.7 for boys and 7.3 for girls). These findings on narrative length, however, are markedly higher than those found in the study by Umiker-Sebeok (1979). Even among the five-year-olds in that study (who were white and whose parents were professionals with an average of 6.7 years of college), stories were on average only 2.8 clauses in length and were completed in 1.5 turns. The conversational narratives collected by Umiker-Sebeok were between children and between children and their teacher in a classroom setting. Umiker-Sebeok (1979, p.106) noted some key differences between conversational narratives in child-child vs. child-adult exchanges among her studied population, "chief among which was the greater length and complexity of those where an adult was the listener." Casden (1970) also found that children provided longer sentences for adult listeners because of less frequent interruptions and less play activity. The presence of an adult listener is a pertinent consideration in understanding the difference in results between these studies. It should be noted, however, that in this study, the presence of two adults (the investigator and mother) in the conversation sessions, had the opposite effect of that described by Umiker-Sebeok and Casden. It should also be noted that both active play and interruptions were common in conversation sessions which included one of the child's friends. The average clause length in these sessions was still more than twice that of the five-year-olds in the Umiker-Sebeok study.

Another interesting comparison between the findings of this study with other studies concerns narrative structural elements. The results of this study and that of Umiker-Sebeok are identical in terms of overall average structural elements per narrative -- 2.5. There is a pronounced difference, however, in the use of evaluative elements. In the Umiker-Sebeok study, 18% of the narratives contained at least one evaluative device (38% of the narratives for the five-year-olds). Similarly, Miller & Sperry (1988) found evaluation in 18% of the episodes of talk about the past of 2 1/2-year-olds. Umiker-Sebeok found comparators accounting for the smallest percentage of the evaluative devices in her study. In sharp contrast, 72% of the narratives in this study had at least one evaluative device, and comparators accounted for the largest percentage. More similar to my findings, Peterson & McCabe (1983) found

46% of the narrative clauses produced by four-year-olds expressing some form of evaluation.

There are two important points to be considered in view of this glaring difference in the use of narrative evaluation. First, according to Robinson (1981), evaluation is primarily influenced by the narrative situation. As discussed earlier, the evaluative dimension of narrative provides the listener with the personal meaning of the experiences being recounted. Narratives will tend to be more highly evaluated in a comfortable setting, with a sympathetic audience and with a topic of salience for both speaker and listener. The other point is that certain types and patterns of evaluation appearing in narrative are not just individual innovations, but may express "cultural evaluations" (Stahl, 1977, p.20), in that specific sociocultural conventions call for their inclusion.

> In other words, the child's repertoire of storytelling devices and formulas may include the use of evaluative clauses, and he or she may employ such evaluative devices not for any of the particular functions described by Labov, but because their inclusion is part of the way one tells a story (Brady, 1980 pp.177-178).

What constitutes an *effective story* may be culturally relative, and *effectiveness* may not be equated with a quantity of the structural elements presented here.

Differing from other studies on children's narratives (e.g. Ames, 1966 and Miller & Sperry 1988) and from Labov's (1972) study of narratives from an urban black community, violence and aggression were not the most frequently occurring themes in these stories, and these stories did not have the singular function of the "self-aggrandisement" of the narrator. While 64% of the episodes of talk about the past in Miller & Sperry's study of 2 1/2-year olds were negative, with physical harm being the largest subcategory (43%), this study did not find such a clear predominance of negative stories, and the largest subcategory was positive -- emotional gain (34%). In a similar study by Fung (1987) in a Chinese community in Chicago, emotional gain also emerged as the largest story content subcategory (32%) among 3 1/2-year-olds. Because both age and culture varied across these groups, the source of these content differences remains uncertain.

This corpus included narratives with a variety of themes and social functions. There were stories of "beating up" and "body slamming", as well as those of eating pizza and going on carnival rides. There were stories presenting the narrator's autonomous, competent and adult-like qualities, as well as those showing vulnerability and seeking sympathy. Narratives also occurred that functioned mainly to entertain, joke with or tease the audience. Not all of the narratives were "reportable" (Labov, 1982) in the sense of being unusual experiences, in accord with Robinson's (1981, p.62) suggestion that commonplace and ordinary experiences may provide material for effective narratives, depending on the audience and narrative context.

This study, in its procedure for collecting child narratives and its evaluation of the narratives obtained, has emphasised the importance of the social context in which narratives are told, especially the relationship between narrator and audience. Narratives were seen in this study as situated communications (Robinson, 1981), whose understanding requires more than just the consideration of structure or form, but of what is being told, to whom and for what purposes. In this study, there was variation in the number and length of narratives associated with changes in the social context of talk. The conversation sessions with only the child and the investigator yielded the longest stories on average and the highest rate of occurrence of stories of personal experience. Perhaps one reason for more and longer narratives in the sessions with only the child and the investigator is that many of the narratives where a sibling, friend or the mother was present, were told collaboratively. The collaborations, interruptions and other features of multi-party talk may reduce the number of clauses contributed by each child to the telling of a narrative. In such multi-party,

collaboratively told narratives, there were also instances of challenges to the validity of statements made by other parties, and disagreements on how the actual sequence of events took place.

The only stories of personal experience that occurred in sessions with both the mother and investigator present were elicited, and were usually composed of short responses to interlocutor questions. The mother of one of the children in the study offered a hypothesis for explaining this difference in talk in settings with two adults present. The presence of two adults -- the mother and an adult friend, she pointed out, might not be the optimal situation for the child to speak freely. She felt that in such a situation, her son would probably find it socially appropriate to show deference toward the adult speakers, and would restrict and more closely monitor what he would say. It is the opinion of this mother, and a finding of this study, that narratives are greatly influenced by the social relationship between child and audience.

While examining the various descriptive categories and contexts of these stories, this study compared stories initiated by the child with those initiated by other people. It was found that even when great care was taken to enhance the relationship between the child and investigator, and to foster informal talk, child-initiated narratives were still longer, more structurally complex, and more highly evaluated than those that were initiated by someone else. These findings are of particular importance in that most studies within the literature on child development have relied on the elicitation of stories by researchers. It has also been argued that child-initiated ("spontaneous") speech and speech in response to an eliciting question involve fundamentally different processes in their production (Bloom, Rocissano, & Hood, 1976; Hood & Bloom, 1979). It may be easier for children to say something based on their own semantic intention than on a semantic intention that was influenced by the message of another speaker.

The contrasts between child-initiated and other-initiated stories found in this study reflect the situated character of narratives, as well as what was found to be a general function of these narratives -- the sharing of meaningful personal experiences or "the sharing of something substantial" (James Fernandez, personal communication). While an investigator's proficiency at selecting topics or themes for effectively eliciting stories from a particular child may improve over time, the various contextual elements in which narratives are situated change not only from one conversation to the next, but within each conversation as dialogue unfolds. Within any given constellation of contextual features, it would be very difficult (if not impossible) for an investigator to initiate the child's retrieval of the experience from the past that is most meaningful or "substantial" at that moment. The most emotionally salient, personally meaningful experience to share at a specific point in conversation and context must emerge on the child's own volition.

Finally, this study compared the forms of interlocutor participation in narratives initiated by the child with those initiated by other people. This examination revealed similar patterns in nine out of eleven categories of interlocutor participation. The only pronounced difference occurred with respect to interlocutor questions seeking further elaboration. Overall and for each child, there was a greater frequency of interlocutor questions seeking further elaboration of the complicating action in other-initiated stories than in child-initiated stories. These results suggest more of an interactional rather than causal relationship between the verbal contributions of the child and interlocutor. Interlocutor verbal participation not only influenced, but was influenced by the talk of the child. When a child initiated a story, the interlocutor indicated interest and attentiveness, supporting the unfolding of the story. Other-initiated stories were shorter and less detailed, prompting the interlocutor to ask for further elaboration.

Personal storytelling has long been a flourishing tradition in Afro-American communities. It pervades everyday conversation as well as more ritualized genres such as signifying and testifying, and the written forms of Afro-American literary expression. Ethnographic and sociolinguistic

findings attesting to the rich variety of talk in Afro-American communities stand in stark contrast to the verbal deprivation theories. Those theories, depicting black children as communicating only through gesture, emotional cries and single, disjointed words referring only to action here and now, were construed (or misconstrued) from the talk (or lack of talk) obtained in studies disregarding the issues of social context, the social relationship between child and interviewer, as well as the emotional significance of the topic about which talk was elicited. Tragically, as noted earlier, such theories persist. These theories are guided by and contribute to a larger, pervasive narrative that obtains in a color-caste, stratified society. That narrative posits the cause of lower class and caste status as simply an internal deficiency within an individual or group – e.g. deficient language abilities. The findings of this study offer no support for that narrative. This study illustrates the proficiency of five preschool-aged children in a low-income black community in telling stories of personal experience. In terms of structural complexity, they showed a level of mastery equal to or exceeding that reported in studies of other groups of children. These children were especially adept at "evaluating" or communicating the personal meaning of past experiences. In this corpus of narratives can be seen the insipient skills for becoming participants in an important tradition in Afro-American communities. Verbal performance, "the ability to contend effectively with words" is a highly valued social skill in Afro-American communities (Abrahams, 1972).

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A Story of Personal Experience (SPE)

K - Keesha
R - Randy (investigator)

K: He (her cat) fall down too. Bumped his head. He didn't say nothing. My cat can't talk.

R: Your cat can't talk?

K: Um um. He got blood on his face.

R: How'd he get blood on his face?

K: He bumped his head on there. On that shelf. That's how he got blood.

R: Aw.

K: I didn't bump mine's on that couch, shelf.

R: You didn't bump your head on it?

K: Um um. It was blood on there. (pause) It was on his face, on his eyes, right under here (under chin).

R: Aw, I bet that hurt.

K: That cat say nothing. He didn't say nothing. My cat can't talk.

R: Yeah. Yeah.

K: I put a band-aide on it.

R: Yeah.

K: And it gone away.

R: Huh. On your, you put a band-aide on your cat?

K: Yup. Then it was gone away.

R: Yeah?

K: I put alcolaus on it.

R: Alcohol on it?

K: And its gone.

A Future Plan Story (FP) by Cedric

C - Cedric
Q - Quen
R - Randy (investigator)

C: I'm on took she over her momma house. (Referring to Quen)
R: You what?
C: I'm took her over her momma house.
R: Aw, yeah?
C: I'm on go over (cut off by Quen)
Q: You don't got no car!
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C: I drive, I'm put her in my car...(cut off by Quen)
Q: No you ain't! I got a car! I'm on get in my own car. My momma gone buy it for me.
C: I'm on buy it for you.
R: You gone do what? You gone buy her a car?
C: I'm on buy her a (?) car.
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.
C: I'm drop her home. (Referring to Quen) I'm on drop her home.
R: You gone do what?
C: I'm on drop her home.
R: You gone drop her home?
C: I'm be in front.
Q: You gone be home with me?
C: I'm on be home with you.

A Fantasy Story (F) by Keesha

K - Keesha
R - Randy (investigator)

(Talking about a trip to the zoo)

K: I was cooking tacos, for the monkeys.
R: You were cooking tacos for the monkeys? How did you cook them? What did you do?
K: I put the light in there, then I didn't burn myself.
R: So how do you make tacos?
K: You put shell on, then you cook the meat first.
R: O.K., the meat first, and then what do you do?
K: Then put some, I like hot sauce, then on, taco hot sauce. Monkeys like hot sauce.
R: Monkeys like hot sauce? Do they like tacos too?
K: They like pepper too.
R: They like pepper?
K: They like salt. And my cat was feeding them too.
R: Your cat was feeding them too? Your cat was feeding the monkeys?
K: My cat was cooking too, 'cause he was big.

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K: Monkeys have coats. They got little bitty tiny coats.
R: They have little coats? Do they take them off?
K: They take them off by theyself. 'Cause they got real hands.
R: I know, I know they got real hands.
K: They have glasses on so they can read.
R: Oh really? Were they reading?
K: They was reading cat books.
R: They were reading cat books?
K: They was reading YOUR book.
R: Were they reading my book?
K: (nods yes)
R: Did they like it?
K: They read they own self.
R: Yeah? Oh boy. I bet that's fun.
K: Then they went outside and ride they bikes, the monkeys. I let them get on my bike. They was two monkeys. And the monkey was IRONING.

A Story of Personal Experience Containing Fantasy (SF) by George

G - George
R - Randy (investigator)

G: And you know Corey.
R: Yeah.
G: That boy, he be coming in, he be coming to wrestle me outside.
R: Yeah. Huh.
G: And then I be, then I, I'm rough.
R: I know. I've seen you pick up Corey. I saw you pick up Corey one day.
G: And I just body slammed him.
R: Yeah? Huh.
G: Then, then, then he went to the hospital.
R: (laugh)
G: Then he came out the hospital.
R: Yeah? So he's all right now?
G: Yep.

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G: Yep. And I used to swing him (Corey) around.
R: Really? Yeah?
G: Then, then I swing him all around on the floor.
R: Yeah?
G: Yep, and I swung him, "Swoooosh."
R: Didn't he get hurt?
G: Then he, then he, then he got hurt.
R: Yeah, I bet. I bet.
G: And Cor, and Carnella, she just beat up Mike-Mike.
R: Yeah?
G: Uh huh. 'Cause Carnella not Mike-Mike girl friend no more.
R: Oh really?
G: Uh uh, she my girlfriend.

A Hypothetical Plan (HP) by Darryl

D - Darryl
R - Randy (investigator)

(Looking in kangaroo book, we find photo of kangaroos fighting.)

D: I can, I can, when the kangaroos fighting me, I know I can beat them kangaroos up.
R: Can you beat a kangaroo up? What? How would you beat a kangaroo? That kangaroo, man, would be punching you.
D: I'd get a knife and kill him. (laugh)
R: That kangaroo? Yeah?
D: And lay him down, and cover they mouth up, and tie him up, and then stick in they head, they'll be bleeding.

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R: How could you beat up that kangaroo?
D: When he try to come close I'll do a flip.
R: You'd do a flip?
D: Yup. Right in his face. Plooof! (laugh)

Stories with 'Negative' Content

Physical Harm:

Q - Qura

Q: George ran me over
then I had two sores on my leg,
and it was bleeding!

Emotional Harm:

Q: It was a carnival by my gramma's house. It's closed.
It's down. It's coming back.
R: Did you go?
Q: Yup. And I cried at the carnival too.
R: You cried at the carnival? Why?
Q: 'Cause I didn't want to come. 'Cause my momma came with me, and my daddy came with me, and my momma.
R: Then why were you crying? Why didn't you want to go?
Q: 'Cause I was scared of that bear at the carnival.

Damage to Property:

Q: I got a little stove. It can't work.
R: You got a little stove?
Q: 'Cause it can't work no more. I still got some batteries, some more batteries in it.
R: It's got batteries but it still doesn't work? ...Why not?
Q: 'Cause Joey aym broke it (pause) the glass, the top of it.
R: What did he do to it?
Q: He was cooking, and BRAKE it. He want it like that. 'Cause Santa Clause gone buy me another one, one that can work...with the light on it.

Stories with 'Positive' Content

Material Gain:

D - Darryl

D: I got some new books at home.
R: Yeah?
D: Yup. My gramma brought them.
R: What kind?
D: One got some bones on it, and one got fish on it.
R: Your grandmother got them.
D: Her name Bates... Her bring me a whole lot of books.

Emotional Gain:

G - George

G: Oooh. Know what I had?
R: What?
G: No lie. I had, my brother had him a birthday party.
R: When?
G: Last time. You should've come.
R: Yeah? Where was the birthday party at?
G: At home.
R: Yeah? And what happened? What did you have there?
G: Cake, ice cream ...

Example of a story categorised as 'Other':

(A story about routine, ordinary events.)

Q: My momma was, uh, at, at her house.
And my momma said she, see us later at church.

Example of a story categorised as 'Ambiguous':

(A story about non-routine events, but it is not clear whether the events are positive or negative.)

(Pointing to photographs of snakes in a book)

C: My momma took me see that snake.

R: Where?

C: Right here. (Pointing to snakes in book)
Then she took me to the other snakes,
right here and right here.

A Story (SPE) with Structural Elements Marked

K - Keesha
R - Randy (investigator)

(Noticing a small cut on Keesha's head)

R: How did this happen?

K: I bumped myself. (Abstract)

R: How did you do that?

K: At the, in the house (Orientation)
I bumped my head to that plant, (Complication)
then a book came down then (Complication)
it put all right there. (Complication)

R: On a lamp?

K: Then I hit myself on the other one, (Complication)
then they gone. On the plant.
It's gone. It's gone. (Coda)
This one's still in, this one's going to gone,
it swoled up.

R: Oh boy. I bet that hurt didn't it?

K: Didn't even hurt. (Evaluation)
Blood was coming out it.

R: Blood was coming out? How did you do that?

K: 'Cause I bumped myself to that plant.

R: What, were you playing...and bumped into it?
Or what happened?

K: Then mommy put a band-aid on it, (Resolution)
then it went on the band-aid,
then the blood was gone.

(Evaluative devices are underlined.)